

5. PARKING STRUCTURES

In downtown Lynchburg, there is a perceived shortage of parking, yet vacant spaces can be observed in many lots. Looking forward, parking is an important factor in redevelopment, since renovation and new construction are often difficult to finance without a commitment of assigned parking spaces. However, it is important to note that new parking garages alone do not revitalize downtowns—residential, retail, entertainment and business activities do. People will be attracted to downtown for these reasons, not for new garages. People don't avoid a desirable area or setting because of tight parking (i.e., people attending Friday Cheers at the Community Market park as far away as Ninth and Commerce Streets). Having said that, new parking must be located carefully to be sensitive to the historic fabric and to the gateway views of the city from the bridges.

The parking study reveals that certain zones downtown have shortages, while other areas have surpluses (see Appendix). The projections for future parking account for all proposed Master Plan land use changes, including new development, renovation and reuse of vacant space, and the removal of surface lots for new construction. New parking spaces are proposed to satisfy demand within each zone, and these parking structures and lots are incorporated into the final Master Plan.

The analysis addresses the relationship between parking demand and parking supply. The parking study also addresses the fact that steep slopes affect people's perception about convenient parking. Similarly, the street environment can affect people's perceptions so that vacant ground-floor buildings or extensive surface parking lots can make a journey seem longer. Shared use of parking, between nighttime and daytime, and between weekday and weekend, is accounted for in the parking generation estimates. The overall goal for downtown is to encourage more active ground-level uses (particularly in retail), renovate vacant buildings, and infill new buildings whenever possible.

The key locations for new parking structures are identified on Figure 5 and the economics and siting issues are discussed as follows.

5.1 Jefferson and Eighth Street Parking Garage

The proposed parking garage at Eighth and Jefferson is a strategic first-phase project that will enhance redevelopment of the J. W. Ould Building, Amazement Square, Riverviews Lofts and the Wachovia Tower. The structure could range from 200 to 675 spaces, and be built into the hillside to minimize visual impact, especially from the John Lynch Bridge and from Amazement Square. Adjacent to Amazement Square, the structure should not be more than four levels. The upper levels should be set back to allow the retail section and parking entry along Ninth Street to stand out. This will provide lower-cost space as an incentive for retail uses in the initial phases.

As an economic model, we have analyzed a prototypic 450-space, above-grade parking garage. In addition, this parking facility has the potential to generate revenue through retail leases at the ground level.



Garages should contribute to the character of the street.

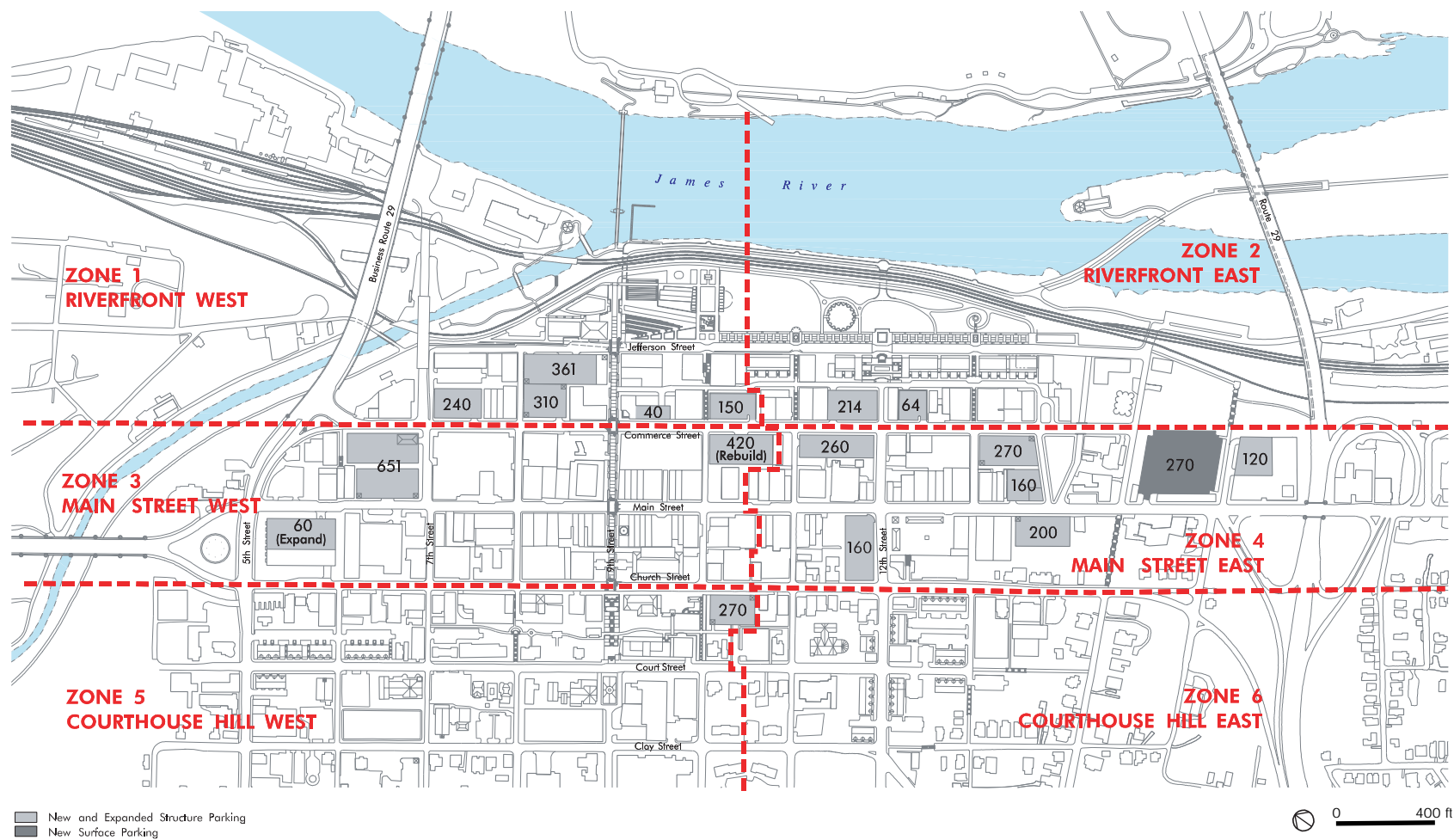


Figure 5. Potential Parking Sites

Program and Operating Assumptions

- Assumes construction by public sector (Parking Authority) using below-market interest rates through financing mechanism such as Industrial Revenue Bonds.
- Estimated development costs of \$10,000 per space, or \$4.5 million with a maximum cost per space of \$13,250 to break even.
- Assumes daily parkers use 35% of spaces, with 65% used by those who contract for parking on a monthly basis.
- Assumes achieving a rate of \$50/month for monthly parking and \$8/day for daily parking to break even or be profitable (current rates are \$40/month and \$3/day).

Feasibility and Economics

- Estimated annual revenue potential of \$358,000 supports a development cost of about \$6 million, or \$13,250/space to break even. (Retail rents at this stage are expected only to cover operating expenses and amortize tenant improvements, not contribute to net operating income.)
- Increasing the proportion of spaces allocated to monthly parking leases will negatively affect the project's financial feasibility. Daily parking is the primary revenue generator.
- If monthly parking rates cannot exceed \$40/month, and daily rates cannot exceed \$3/day, then a higher annual utilization will need to be achieved (90% instead of 70%) to break even.

5.2 Commerce Street Parking Garages

Commerce Street will continue to serve as a major service road, providing good access to a series of parking structures on both sides of the street. On the south side, larger structures can be built into the hillside and connect directly to the back of buildings along Main Street, where parking demand is heavy. On the north side of the street, different types of structures are proposed to provide parking for the residential and mixed uses along Jefferson Street and the Lower Bluff Walk. Approximately 2,800 additional parking spaces could be accommodated in this corridor in a number of new structures that are sited to replace surface parking lots with more efficient use of downtown land. This is a twenty-year goal.

The Master Plan proposes that the existing garage at 1001-1021 Commerce Street (Webb Parking) be considered for redevelopment at some point in the future to maximize the use and the aesthetics of this prime parking site behind Main Street. The current garage contains 250 spaces on three floors, while a newer garage will accommodate 420 spaces on five floors, similar to the adjacent City parking structure.

In order to satisfy the demand from GE Financial Assurance and other offices on Main Street West, the Master Plan proposes a 650-car garage between GE Financial Assurance and the Academy of Music. This structure will replace 180 surface-parking spaces and will allow for street-level retail uses on Main Street and 3½ levels of parking that step up the hillside. Since they will operate at different times of day, the office uses and the Academy of Music offer opportunities to share parking.

5.3 Main Street Parking Garages

Along Main Street, most of the vacant lots are too small to accommodate a reasonable-size parking structure and the existing buildings should be retained to promote the historic character of downtown. The primary opportunities for new parking along Main Street are an expansion of the existing structure adjacent to the downtown hotel and new structures at the east end of downtown where grades drop off near Horseford Street.

The Holiday Inn parking structure was designed for half a deck more of parking, which would add 60 cars in this critical location where parking demand is highest. At the eastern gateway into downtown, two new parking structures can be accommodated on either side of Main Street near Horseford. One of these garages could house the new James River Welcome Center so that visitors arriving in downtown could see an immediate destination, park their cars before entering the heart of downtown, and continue their explorations on foot. The ice rink proposed at Twelfth and Main Streets could hold as many as 160 cars on the lower level if this structure is built at least partially into a hillside.

Along Main Street, it may be possible to remove the back portion of some of the retail buildings to provide parking and service in the center of the block. The facade and valuable retail frontage would remain (see Section 9.8).

5.4 Church Street Parking Garage

To satisfy parking demand generated by City Hall and the Courthouse expansions, a new parking garage is proposed for the 1000 Block of Church Street. This 270-car parking structure will be built into the hillside with four levels, maintaining visibility of some of the historic buildings on Court Street. The site is currently occupied by a vacant office building that will need to be removed. The design of the Church Street structure must respond to the presence of the cobblestone-surfaced Tenth Street, exploring opportunities to make pedestrian connections from the various garage levels. This garage would replace the garage that has been proposed next to the City Elevator, providing an alternative location that is larger in size and that preserves opportunities to create a pocket park at the base of the elevator.

5.5 Facade Improvements on Existing Garages

Certain garages in the downtown require aesthetic improvements. These improvements will integrate the parking structures into the character of the surrounding historic buildings, look friendlier and safer, and send a message of pride and care in the downtown. In some cases these improvements are cosmetic, while in others the long-term solution should be redevelopment to maximize the amount of parking spaces while also upgrading appearance. Cosmetic changes involve the replacement of chain link fence with ornamental fence, tree planting to mitigate the scale of garage structures, and the application of paint on concrete and railings, using a palette of colors that is compatible with the brick and wrought iron character of the historic buildings. The key garages downtown requiring these aesthetic improvements include the City-owned garage on Commerce Street, the Webb parking garages on Commerce Street and Tenth Street, on Church Street between Tenth and Eleventh Street, and the YMCA parking garage.